Course Outline

This course will explore the dynamics of political change in post-Mao China through an examination of selected systemic challenges and regime responses. The primary focus will be on processes of institutional development and decay as the Party-State regime alternates between hard and soft authoritarianism. A secondary theme will deal with evolving state-society relations, exploring the regime’s efforts to manage an increasingly diverse and restive society. An important goal of the course will be to introduce students to the major scholarly debates within the contemporary China studies field, as well as to the primary and secondary materials available for empirical research on these questions.

Course Format and Requirements

The course will be organized as a colloquium/seminar centered on class readings. Responsibility for summarizing and commenting on the readings will be rotated among seminar participants. Grades will be based on the following:

1. Participation: 20%;
2. 2 reading summary/critiques (5-7 pages) 50%
3. Research Exercise 5-7 pages, 30%

Readings: Posted on Quercus by topic and date.

Topics and Readings:

May 9 Course Introduction/Historical Overview


May 11 Problematics, Paradigms, and Hunches: Pekingology Revisited
4. Alice Miller, ‘Valedictory’, China Leadership Monitor, # 57
9. William Overholt, China’s Crisis of Success, Chapter 1.
10. Andrew Mertha, “Fifty Years of Engagement: The China Scholar Community and the Study of China,” Engaging China, 2021

May 16

China: ‘Resilient Authoritarianism’ or “Trapped Transition”? 

2. Minxin Pei, “Is China’s Transition Trapped and What should the West do about it?” Centre for Social and Legal Studies, University of Oxford, 2007/
5. Vivienne Shue and Patricia Thornton, To Govern China, Introduction.

May 18

Chinese Perspectives on Systemic Challenges


May 23

Change as Process: Three Models

2. Kellee S. Tsai, Capitalism Without Democracy, Chapters 2&7, (pp. 17-43; 200-221)
5. Yun Yun Ang How China Escaped Poverty, Selected sections.

May 25

Village Democracy and Health Policy: Case Studies of Process


May 30

Can the Party Reinvent itself?


June 1

Ideology and Legitimacy: Restoring Orthodoxy?

4. “Internet Commentator”
June 6  Elite Conflict and Institutionalization

1. Susan Shirk, (The Political Logic of Economic Reform, (1993), Chapter 4 ("Leadership Incentives.")
5. Cheng Li, “Leadership Politics in the Xi Jinping Era”
8. Roger Garside Coup: Great Leap to Freedom, University of California Press, 2021

June 8  Managing Protest

5. Zhen Jianghua, “The Perilous Life of a Young Activist in China.”
6. Xu Zhiyong, “Dear Chairman Xi, It’s Time for You to Go,” (2021)
8. Chen Xi, Social Protest and Contentious Authoritarianism, Introduction
The China Model: Governance Innovation

5. Baogang He and Mark Warren, “Authoritarian Deliberation,”

The ‘Puzzle’ of Popular Support